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"THE CONGRESS VOTING INDEPENDENCE"

A PAINTING BY ROBERT EDGE PINE AND EDWARD SAVAGE IN THE HALL OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

BY

CHARLES HENRY HART

PHILADELPHIA
1905

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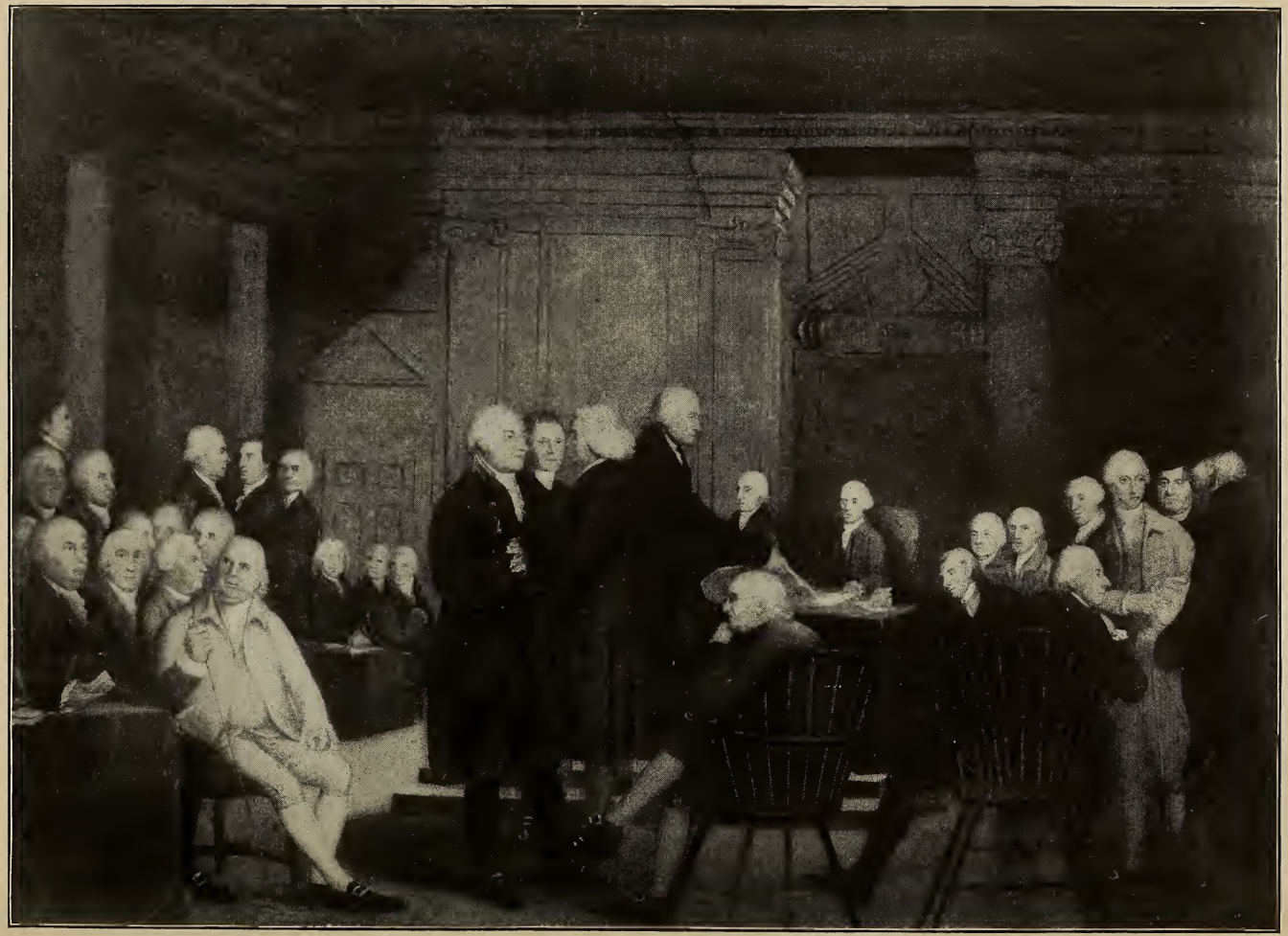

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A Painting by Robert Edge Pine and Edward Savage, in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

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"THE CONGRESS VOTING INDEPENDENCE"

A PAINTING BY ROBERT EDGE PINE AND EDWARD SAVAGE IN THE HALL OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

BY CHARLES HENRY HART

No picture of an American historical event is better known than John Trumbull's *Declaration of Independence.* The crude colossal painting covers considerable wall space, twelve by eighteen feet, in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington, while the beautifully painted small original canvas, only twenty by thirty inches, adorns the Trumbull Gallery, in New Haven, and may readily be accepted as the artist's masterpiece, with its exquisite miniature portraits, several of them, says Mr. John Durand, in his monograph on Trumbull, "comparable to the finest limning of Meissonier." It was engraved in line by Asher Brown Durand, in 1820, the first large and important plate artistically executed in this country, which has been copied large and small, far and wide, until, with John Randolph's witty, but senseless, soubriquet of "the shin piece" tacked to it, it is as generally familiar as Stuart's Athenæum portrait of Washington.

The great value of this picture is as a human document, preserving as it does the portraits of forty-eight persons connected with the most momentous event in the world's history next to Magna Charta. Thirty-six of the portraits

were painted by Trumbull from life, nine are copied from life-portraits by others, and two, Whipple and Harrison, were painted from memory and description. Five of the persons in the picture were not signers, one being Charles Thomson, the Secretary of Congress, and Willing and Dickinson, of Pennsylvania, and George Clinton and Robert R. Livingston, of New York, who were members on July 4th, when the Declaration was adopted, but not in the following August when the engrossed copy was ready for signature. Of the remaining thirteen signers no portraits were known in 1818, when Trumbull finished the original picture.

Until a decade and a half ago the fact that the same great scene, as had animated Trumbull's brush, had several years earlier inspired another painter, had been so entirely lost sight of as to have been virtually unknown, when, in a dark corner of the old Boston Museum, on Tremont Street, the writer discovered the painting of *The Congress Voting Independence*, begun by Robert Edge Pine and finished by Edward Savage, now in the hall of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Upon comparing the Pine and Trumbull pictures there can be but little doubt that Trumbull received something more than mere suggestion, from Pine's earlier composition, for the arrangement of his later picture. Both pictures are remarkably well composed and while Trumbull's may have more stately dignity, Pine's is unquestionably the most realistic and natural. But in the very important feature of the architecture of the room in which the immortal act was consummated, Trumbull did not follow Pine and that feature makes the Pine picture of far greater historical value and importance than that by Trumbull, as Pine reproduces the chamber as it was at the time the Declaration was adopted, for, as our story will show, it was unquestionably painted within its very walls. The history of the picture and of its painters is both interesting and important and deserves to be preserved and perpetuated for future students.

Robert Edge Pine was born in London, according to

Nagler, in 1730, while Bryan, Redgrave, and others give the year 1742. If the earlier date is not correct, the later one seems impossible from the fact that, in 1760, Pine gained the first prize of £100 from the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, for the best historical picture that was offered, *The Surrender of Callais*, with figures as large as life, a hardly possible achievement for a lad of eighteen. He was the son of John Pine, who published (1733–37) the beautiful edition of Horace, with vignettes and text engraved throughout by himself and whose portrait by Hogarth, in the style of Rembrandt, is familiar to students of that artist's work. From whom the son gleaned his art education is not known, but doubtless the rudiments were instilled by his father. In 1762 he again took a first prize for his picture of *Canute Reproving his Courtiers*. Both of these prize pictures have been engraved, which is a distinction that would hardly have been accorded to the works of a youth of eighteen and twenty. Between these two dates he had for a pupil that erratic genius John Hamilton Mortimer (1741–79), which would also scarcely have been the case had he himself been born only in 1742.[1]

Pine devoted himself to historical composition and portraiture, but his chief success was in the latter branch of art. The most familiar portraits of John Wilkes, whose principles he espoused, and of David Garrick, whose friendship he possessed, are from his easel and have been repeatedly engraved, one of the former being lettered, *Patricius Pine humanarum figurarum pictor pinxit.* He painted at least four different portraits of Garrick; the most important for size and composition, *Garrick seated at a table reading Macbeth*, is in the National Portrait Gallery, London, while

[1] There is a mezzotint by McArdell, published in 1752, of "Mr. Lowe and Mrs. Chambers in the characters of Captain Macheath and Polly," after a painting by "R. Pine," which conclusively negatives this date. 1730, is adopted in Leslie Stephens' Dictionary of National Biography, following the writer's article in Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography, vol. v. p. 23.

what is doubtless the original life study for the head in this picture is in Philadelphia. Another portrait of Garrick, by Pine, is in the Lenox Gallery, New York, and, a generation ago, was the subject of an entertaining monograph, by the late Gulian C. Verplanck. From 1760 to 1784, Pine exhibited fifty portraits at the different exhibitions of the Society of Artists and of the Royal Academy. In 1771 he angrily withdrew from the Spring Gardens Incorporated Society of Artists, of which he was a member, on the ground of an insult by the President and removed from London to Bath. Here he painted portraits for eight years, when he returned to London and in 1782 held an exhibition of a collection of Shakespearean pictures that he had painted, some of which were afterwards engraved and published in Boydell's Shakespeare.

In 1784 Pine carried out his often-expressed wish to settle in America, by bringing his family to Philadelphia. His object is shown in two letters written respectively to Messrs. John and Samuel Vaughan, preserved in the Dreer Collection of Autographs in the Pennsylvania Historical Society; and their date fixes his coming at least a year later than that usually given.

London, Cork Street., Burlington Gardens
29th April, 1784.

Sir:—

I had the favour of yours dated the 4th of Feb. last and am greatly oblig'd to you for your kind attention to the disposal of my prints, but hope, soon after this, to have the happy opportunity of thanking you in person at Philadelphia, having resolv'd to endulge myself in visiting the Place and People whom I have most respected. I purpose bringing with me the original Allegorical Picture of America, with many Historical Pictures and others and doubt not the kind assistance of Mr. Vaughan, and the Ladies, towards procuring me a favourable reception. I hope to be able to leave England in about a Month, and am now greatly

employ'd in making preparation. My best respects attend on Mr. Vaughan and Ladies and am Dr. Sir

Your oblig'd and faithful Serv.

R. E. Pine

To John Vaughan, Esq., Philadelphia.

Cork Street, Burlington Gardens.
May 2nd 1784.

Dear Sir:—

In my letter to Mr. John Vaughan in reply to his favour concerning the Prints he obliged me with the care of, I communicated my intention of immediately visiting your happy Country, but I now find that I shall not be able to compleat the business I have in hand, in proper time for the Voyage. I therefore must necessarily postpone for a short time the gratification of a wish and hope I have for some years entertain'd—by which delay I hope I may be favour'd with your opinion of the present state of the country, with respect to the disposition and ability of its inhabitants for giving encouragement to Painting, either at Portraits or in perpetuating to Posterity the many glorious Acts which honours the name of an American. I think I could pass the latter part of my life happier in a Country where the noblest Principles have been defended and establish'd, than with the People who have endeavored to subdue them. I therefore hope you'll be able to satisfye me, that in so doing I do not hazard the rendering myself the less able to provide for my Family. Your kind attention to this and a speedy reply will be very important to me and add to the many services with which you have favour'd my dear Sir

Your much oblig'd and faithfull hum'll serv

R. E. Pine

To Sam'll Vaughan, Esq., Philadelphia.

P. S. Mrs Pine and daughters joyn with me in best regards to Your Self and the Ladies.

The exact date of Pine's coming to Philadelphia is unimportant, but an advertisement in *The Pennsylvania Packet* for November 15, 1784, shows that he was then here and

affords an item of information of the first importance in connection with the picture under consideration. It reads:

Mr. PINE,

being honoured with the use of a commodious apartment in the State-house, for the purpose of painting the most illustrious scenes in the late revolution, hopes that those who are desirous of seeing his pictures, will not disapprove of contributing one quarter of a dollar on entrance, in order to be accommodated with proper attendance, fires and descriptive catalogues of the paintings.

N. B. Attendance will be given at the side door of the Congress chamber, every morning, except Sundays at 11 o'clock. To open to-morrow.

On December 1st, in the same paper, he announces that "The Sessions of the Supreme Court being over Mr. Pine's Pictures are replacing in the Congress Chamber at the State House and may be seen to-morrow (after the hour of eleven) as usual."

And among the Etting Papers in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania will be found *A Descriptive catalogue of Pictures Painted by Robert Edge Pine. 1784. Philadelphia; Printed by Francis Bailey, at Yorrick's Head, in Market Street.* It contains twenty-seven pictures chiefly from Shakespeare, although No. 1 shows the sentiment that brought the painter to this country:—"Allegorical Piece, representing America, after having suffered the several evils of the late American War is lamenting the deaths of those brave officers who fell in the glorious cause of Freedom." This is of course the picture mentioned in the letter to John Vaughan. It was painted as early as 1778 and was engraved on copper, in stipple, by Joseph Strutt, in 1781, and dedicated "To those who wish to sheathe the desolating sword of War and to restore the blessings of Peace and Amity to a divided people." A framed copy of this engraving is in the gallery of The Historical Society; and in the Inventory of Pine's estate, hereafter to be more

particularly mentioned, there appears the original copper plate with one hundred and sixty-eight prints. There is a very rare print of this picture, also in stipple, bearing the name of *A. Doolittle sculp. New Haven.* I have not had the opportunity to compare the Strutt and Doolittle prints to determine whether Doolittle actually re-engraved the Strutt print upon the copper or obtained the original Strutt plate from Pine's estate and inserted his own name as engraver, a not uncommon practice with some followers of the burin.

The object Pine had in view he sought to fulfill by painting portraits of the eminent men of the revolutionary period, with the intention of representing in several large paintings the principal events of the war, but it is doubtful if any of these pictures were completed. That he began their composition we know from the inventory of his estate, on file in the Register's office, at Philadelphia (No. 146 of 1789), which enumerates among other items, unfinished pictures representing *The American Congress Voting Independence*, *Capture of Lord Cornwallis and the Colors laid before Congress*, *General Washington Resigning his Commission to Congress*, *General Washington under the Character of Fortitude*, four portraits of Washington, and the allegory of *America Suffering the Evils of War.*

The first portrait Pine is said to have painted after his arrival here is the well-known one of Francis Hopkinson, now in the gallery of The Pennsylvania Historical Society, and it was a letter from this gentleman to Washington, that drew forth the famous reply from Washington beginning "In for a penny in for a pound is an old adage." This letter is as "hackneyed" as Washington complained he was "to the touches of the painter's pencil;" but the Hopkinson letter has never been printed, so I give it from the original in the Emmet Collection in the New York Public Library.

DEAR SIR:— PHILADA. 19th April 1785.

Encouraged by the friendly notice with which you have upon every occasion been pleased to honor me, I take the

liberty of recommending to your kind attention my friend Mr. Pine, an artist of acknowledged eminence, and who has given the World many pleasing and forcible specimens of Genius. Zeal for the American Cause has brought him over from England, to secure whilst it is yet possible, faithful representations of some of the most interesting Events of the late War—not ideal pictures but real Portraits of the Persons and places concerned. You will easily discover the tendency of this letter and of Mr. Pine's visit. Scenes, wherein you were so conspicuous a Part, cannot be *faithfully* represented if you are omitted. I know you have already suffered much persecution under the painter's pencil and verily believe that you would rather fight a battle, on a just occasion, than sit for a Picture, because there is Life and Vigour in Fortitude, and Patience is but a dull Virtue. I would not insinuate that you have not much Patience but am very sure you have a great deal of good nature and on this we depend on the present occasion. It would be no compliment to Mr. Pine to say he is the most eminent artist, in his way, we have ever had in this country. But his own pencil will display his abilities in much better Terms than my pen, and I have no doubt but you will find him worthy of your notice in every respect. Mrs. Hopkinson joins me in most respectful Regards to your good Lady. With sincerest wishes for your Health and prosperity, I am, Dear Sir Your ever affectionate friend and

faithful humble Servant,

GENL. WASHINGTON. FRAS. HOPKINSON.

Pine's likeness of Washington is feeble and unsatisfactory as are many of the portraits that he painted in this country. At Pine's death he left four portraits of Washington, described in the Inventory as "Kitt-cat," which is unquestionably an error in size for half-length, as the three portraits of him by Pine, now known, are of this size.

Pine was generously patronized by people of consideration, doubtless owing to his friendly disposition toward the

land of his adoption, and Robert Morris, whose best known portrait he painted, built a house for him in Philadelphia which was adapted for the exhibition of his pictures and the prosecution of his painting. He visited Washington, at Mount Vernon in April of 1785,[1] and on his journeyings thither and back he painted a number of pictures in Maryland which survive, including family pictures of the Carroll and of the Caton families. Pine died suddenly of apoplexy in Philadelphia, November 19, 1788, but I have been unable to learn where he was buried. He is described by Joseph Hopkinson as a "very small man, morbidly irritable. His wife and daughters were also very diminutive; they were indeed a family of pigmies." After his death his wife, who kept a school for girls in Philadelphia, petitioned the Legislature of Pennsylvania to be allowed to dispose of her husband's pictures by lottery, which request was granted; but the project was not successful, and only a few were disposed of in that way; the greater number being purchased by Daniel Bowen,[2] proprietor, with Edward Savage, of Savage and Bowen's New York Museum, "a mingled establishment, half painting-gallery, half museum"[3] which Washington visited September 14, 1789, when located at 74 Water Street.[4] Later it was "in Greenwich Street, in a building once used as a circus."[5] Just when the sale to Bowen and Savage took place I do not know, but it must have been subsequent to January 7, 1794, on which date James Kent writes from Philadelphia, "I visited also Pine's Cabinet of Paintings. The colors were coarse, but some of the pict-

[1] "*April 28.*—To Dinner Mr Pine a pretty eminent Portrait & Historical Painter arrived in order to take my picture from the life & to plan it in the Historical pieces he was about to draw. This Gentleman stands in good estimation as a Painter in England;—comes recommended to me from Col^o^ Fairfax—Mr Morris—Govr Dickenson—Mr Hopkinson & others."—*Washington's Diary, 1785.*

[2] Daniel Bowen died in Philadelphia, February 29, 1856, aged 96.

[3] Dunlap, History of the Art of Design, vol. ii. p. 261.

[4] Penna. Mag. of Hist. and Biog., vol. xix. p. 441.

[5] Dunlap, vol. i. p. 321.

ures striking, particularly the allegorical piece representing America."[1] In 1795 the New York Museum was removed to Boston and called the Columbian Museum. It was located at the *Head of the Mall*, and a broadside descriptive catalogue of its contents, in the possession of the writer, enumerates one hundred and twenty-three finished pictures on exhibition, chiefly painted by Pine, beginning with *No. 1. An Allegorical Piece, representing America*, etc., and ending with *The original drawing of America.* The two prize paintings of 1760 and 1762, were respectively Nos. 15 and 16, of the catalogue, which contains also the paintings exhibited in Philadelphia, in 1784, paintings of *Mr. Lowndes and Family of Maryland*, *Mr. Sterrett and Family of Maryland*, and *Mr. Hanson and Family of Maryland;* portraits of Charles Thomson, Richard Henry Lee, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Samuel Chase, General Washington, and many others not pertinent to our present inquiry.[2]

The museum, with the greater portion of its collections, was destroyed by fire January 15, 1803. In 1806, Bowen and W. M. S. Doyle, an indifferent portrait painter, erected the museum building on Tremont Street, which, the next year, was burned, rebuilt, and kept up until 1825, when the Columbian Museum passed to the New England Museum. Fifteen years later the New England Museum became the property of Moses Kimball, who maintained it, as the Boston Museum, for more than half a century. Mr. Kimball died February 21, 1895, aged eighty-nine years. In the fall of 1892, he began the dispersal of the museum collection by the sale of Savage's painting of *The Washington Family*, well known from engravings, now owned by The Democratic Club, New York, and soon afterwards the writer acquired the painting of *The Congress Voting Independence*, now under consideration.

Exactly what portions of the painting of *The Congress*

[1] Kent's Life of Chancellor Kent, Boston, 1898, p. 60.

[2] A very interesting cabinet portrait of Alexander Hamilton, by Pine, has recently come into the possession of Doctor Wier Mitchell.

Voting Independence, were by Pine and what by Savage, it is of course impossible exactly to determine. We know that the picture was left by Pine unfinished when he died, and we know that it afterward came into the possession of Savage. We know that Pine's *painting room was the Congress Chamber in the State House.* We know that the portraits of Francis Hopkinson, sitting at the President's table, writing; of Charles Carroll, seated to the right of Franklin, talking with Stephen Hopkins, the figure to the extreme right, wearing a hat; of George Read, he between Carroll and Hopkins, and of William Paca, the centre of the standing group of three, on extreme left, talking to Doctor Rush, are all from known originals by Pine. We know further that Pine was an educated and accomplished history painter and that this picture, with its thirty-two figures, is remarkably well composed and drawn in a manner far superior to what any of the works of Savage would lead us to assume that he was competent to do. Indeed, the difference in ability of the two men is shown in this very work. The group of four standing before the table, with the senile figure of Franklin, seated near, with legs crossed, is beautiful and most artistic and in strong contrast with the awkward, seated figure of Robert Morris, in front of the table to the left, with walking-stick in hand, which is unquestionably by Savage, as the original of this portrait of Morris, by Savage, is in the possession of the writer. Savage also certainly painted the portraits of John Adams and of Robert Treat Paine on extreme left to front, and he must have limned the benign but characterless profile of Jefferson, who presents the Declaration to Hancock, as Jefferson did not return from France, after an absence of five years, until Pine had been a year in his grave. We know by the Columbian Museum catalogue that Pine had painted portraits of Charles Thomson, seated at the table beside Hancock; of Richard Henry Lee, and of Samuel Chase, but which are Lee and Chase in the picture, I cannot determine. He also painted a portrait of Thomas Stone, but I cannot identify it in the

picture. Of the central group, the figure in profile, with glasses and big wig, facing Adams and Sherman, puzzles me exceedingly. The others being plainly Jefferson, Sherman, John Adams, and Franklin, the fifth should be Robert R. Livingston, the other member of the Committee, but it in no wise resembles him in face, figure, costume, or age. I am inclined to the opinion that it is William Ellery, as he, with Franklin and James Wilson, is the only "signer" always represented wearing spectacles, and it is not Wilson as he sits writing at the table to the rear, on the left of the picture; but why Ellery should be given such a prominent position I cannot surmise. The most interesting piece of portraiture in the painting is undoubtedly the central figure of Franklin. It shows his figure and profile in old age as we have them preserved no where else, and it is an extremely characteristic bit of portrait work, unquestionably from the hand of Pine.[1]

It is my opinion therefore that the composition and details of the picture are entirely by Robert Edge Pine, *painted in the very room in which the event sought to be commemorated was enacted*, which in Pine's time had not been changed or altered, from what it was in 1776, and giving its lines with the exactness of an architectural drawing. The last point is of the first importance, and this painting was accordingly made use of in the recent restoration of Independence Hall to its original condition. That Savage finished Pine's picture of *The Congress Voting Independence*, is shown not only inherently, but also by the old Museum Catalogues in the Public Library at Boston. He did more. He essayed the engraving of it upon copper the same size as the painting, twenty-six inches by nineteen inches, and the unfinished copper plate to-day is in the cabinet of the Massachusetts Historical Society, as the work of an unknown engraver.[2] It was reserved for the writer to discover that

[1] Franklin died April 17, 1790, and Savage did not visit Philadelphia until after this date.

[2] Proceedings of the Mass. Hist. Society, 1858–60, p. 391.

this plate was also the work of Edward Savage. At the auction sale of the papers of Colonel Trumbull, in this city, a few years ago, I chanced upon a letter that told the story. It was dated "Boston April 11, 1818," from Edward Savage, son of the painter, to John Trumbull, offering to sell to the latter the plate and paper of the "print of Congress '76 wich my Farther (late Edward Savage) had nerely compleated," stating that "the plate is now in a situation that it may be finished in a few weeks." Trumbull drafted his reply upon the letter he had received, as was his custom, in which he declines the offer, stating that "my painting of the subject was begun more than thirty years ago and all the heads were soon after secured." Trumbull's given period for beginning his picture of *The Declaration of Independence*, the year of Pine's death, adds strength to my thought that he received something more than "mere suggestion" for his picture from Pine's earlier work. This view is further fortified by the fact that Trumbull did not actually begin his picture until 1791, as he wrote to Jefferson, a few months earlier than his letter to Savage.

Edward Savage was born in Princeton, Massachusetts, November 26, 1761, and died there July 6, 1817. He was originally a goldsmith, but subsequently turned his attention to painting and engraving. Towards the close of 1789 he left Massachusetts for New York, armed with a letter from President Willard, of Harvard College, to President Washington, requesting him to sit to Savage for a portrait which the painter desired to present to the university. Washington complied with the request and gave Savage a first sitting on December 21 "from ten to one o'clock"[1] Washington sat again a week later "all the forenoon," and on January 6, 1790, "from half after eight o'clock till ten, for the portrait painter Mr. Savage to finish the picture of me which he had begun for the University of Cambridge." This portrait is on canvas, twenty-five by thirty inches, and Josiah Quincy, for many years President of Harvard, declared it

[1] Washington's Diary, 1789–91. New York, 1860.

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to be the best likeness he had ever seen of Washington, "though its merits as a work of art were but small."

Savage subsequently removed to Philadelphia, the seat of government, and in 1791 went to London, where he is said to have studied under West, and afterwards to have visited Italy. While in London he engraved and published, after his own paintings, bust portraits, in stipple, of General Knox (December 7, 1791), and of Washington (February 7, 1792), and his well-known three-quarter length portrait of the President, in mezzotint (June 25, 1793), his first work in that style.[1] When he returned to this country he settled in Philadelphia, where his brother, John Savage, was engaged as a publisher, and there issued mezzotint portraits, also from his own paintings, of Anthony Wayne (June 1, 1796), Doctor Rush (February 6, 1800), and Jefferson (June 1, 1800), and folio plates in stipple of *Liberty* (June 1, 1796), and of *The Washington Family* (March 10, 1798). These plates show Savage to have been a much better engraver than painter as his plates both in stipple and in mezzotint are skilfully and pleasingly executed. The stories promulgated by Dunlap, and very commonly adopted and repeated, that Edwin engraved the plates bearing Savage's name are absurd on their face and disproved by dates.

This survey of the entire subject, with the abundant data I have been able to adduce in support of my view, I feel must be accepted without question as fixing the authorship of the painting of *The Congress Voting Independence*, owned by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, upon Robert Edge Pine, who left the work unfinished at his death, and the unfinished canvas coming into the possession of Edward Savage, was completed by him.[2]

[1] For other engravings after Savage's portraits of Washington, see "Catalogue of the Engraved Portraits of Washington. By Charles Henry Hart. New York, The Grolier Club. 1904."

[2] For an account of *Edward Savage Painter and Engraver and his unfinished copper-plate of The Congress Voting Independence,* by the present writer, see Proc. of Mass. Historical Society for January, 1905.

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